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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses trends in British and U.S. school reform and compares government support of education by the "loyal opposition" of both countries. Between 1980 and 1995, school reform policies in the United States generally enjoyed broad, bipartisan support. The same, however, cannot be said in Britain where ideological differences between the Tory and Labor Parties made reform efforts highly controversial, eventually culminating in the newly elected Labor government's acceptance of the "Education Reform Act of 1988." On the other hand, change in U.S. educational policy did not begin until after the November 1994 U.S. election, when right-wing Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress. Thereafter, 15 years of bipartisanship education policy suddenly evaporated. President Clinton's "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" came under attack even though many agreed it held the most promise for substantial improvement of U.S. education. When compared to the UK, the United States is more likely to see change in its education policy as a result of the "loyal opposition" gaining power. (Contains 29 references.) (DFR)

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The "Loyal Opposition" and the Future of British and US School Reform[1]

William Lowe Boyd

OVERVIEW

In the USA school reform policies since 1980 have generally had broad, bipartisan support. School reform in Britain[2] by contrast, has been highly controversial since 1979, with the ruling Tories and the opposing Labour Party very much at odds. This has led to speculation about how much would be changed if and when the Labour Party takes control of the national government. Despite the heated ideological differences between the parties, however, the Labour Party has—gradually, increasingly and to a remarkable extent—accepted the policies established in the *Education Reform Act of 1988* and subsequent related Acts. Because one of the most controversial of all Tory education policies revolves around the provision for opted-out, Grant Maintained Schools (GMSs), the decision by Tony Blair, the Leader of the Opposition, to send one of his children to a GMS (and one of the most elite at that) has made the Labour Party's position on education policy even more uncertain.

In the USA, remarkably—and rather unexpectedly—the November 1994 election saw the Republicans gain control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years. Because the right-wing of the Republican Party has gained control, many features of government policy are being challenged and changed. The bipartisanship characterising education policy over the past ten years has suddenly evaporated as the moderate Republicans who provided this support are now less influential. As a consequence, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*—passed in March 1994—is under attack and may be dismantled (not to mention the US Department of Edu-

[1]An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Bath, Bath, England, September 1995.

[2]Where appropriate, the terms "UK" and "Britain" are used throughout this article: UK when the political context includes England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland; Britain when the specific educational reforms under discussion apply to England and Wales.

cation itself). This would be a dramatic (and traumatic) development because the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* represents the most startling example of US bipartisanship in education policy and, many experts agree, holds the most promise for substantial improvement of US education. It is thus ironic that the USA is likely to see more change in its education policy than the UK as a result of the loyal opposition gaining power, even though it does not yet control the executive branch (the White House).

BACKGROUND: TRENDS IN BRITISH AND US SCHOOL REFORM

The major political parties in the UK and the USA parallel each other in many ways: Conservatives and Republicans have much in common as the love feast between Thatcher and Reagan demonstrated. Likewise, Labour and the Democrats are inclined toward similar philosophies, although socialism never has played the role in the Democratic party or the USA that it has in the UK. But since the mid-1970s, the decline of public faith in the welfare state and the growing ascendancy of the conservative belief in individualism, competition, and market forces has forced both the Labour and Democratic Parties to rethink their philosophies and to try to reinvent themselves to compete more effectively for middle-class voters. Indeed, according to Seddon (1995), the "scale and speed of the 'new Labour' cultural revolution, under the leadership of Tony Blair, has many in the Labour Party 'shell-shocked.'" This has prompted Seddon and others to ask "Is Labour now too right-wing?"

These trends, along with a public discourse of derision (Ball, 1990), have de-legitimised progressive education policies in both Britain and the USA and changed the focus of the policy debate. Although this process of derision was not as dramatic in the USA as that portrayed in Britain by Ball the effects were quite similar. This can be seen readily in a comparison of charts (see Tables 1 and 2) prepared by Ball (p. 4) and by Clark and Astuto (1986, p. 4). Clearly, ideology and debate over education policy in both countries have developed along a number of parallel lines despite many significant differences in social and political contexts.

Thus, as discussed elsewhere (Boyd, 1995), the parallels between the school reform efforts of the Thatcher and Major Governments in the UK, and those of the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton Governments in the USA, are extensive and increasing especially due to the thrust of President Bush's *America 2000* education strategy announced in April 1991, and President Clinton's continuation of this approach in the aforementioned *Goals 2000: Educate America Act.*

Some of these similarities come from conscious trans-Atlantic borrowing of policies. Kenneth Baker,[3] for example, made a whirlwind visit to the USA, saw some magnet schools and then created City Technology Colleges (CTCs). Similarly, the idea of school-business compacts or partnerships, especially the example of the Boston Compact, received extensive attention in Britain. And, more recently, aspects of the *Education Reform Act 1988* (especially its National Curriculum and assessment provisions) are strongly echoed in *America 2000* and *Goals 2000.*

Some other highlights of the parallels are the following:

- in both countries reform efforts are driven—and largely justified—by the claim that a better educated workforce is needed to enhance economic competitiveness;
- in both countries reforms are simultaneously increasing both the degree of centralisation and the degree of decentralisation of school governance. Thus, in both countries, more decision-making authority is being shifted to the school level—school-based management in the USA, local management of schools (LMS) in Britain. But, at the same time, there are new centralising forces: the National Curriculum in Britain and the new National Goals in the USA (a surprising and totally unprecedented development, given the strong US tradition of local control of education);

[3] The Rt Hon. Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education and Science, 1986-1989.

TABLE 1. TERMS THAT CHARACTERISE THE US EDUCATIONAL POLICY STANCE BEFORE AND AFTER 1980*

PRE-1980 TERMS	POST-1980 EQUIVALENT TERMS
Needs and access	Ability; selectivity; minimum standards
Social and welfare concerns	Economic and productivity concerns
Common school	Parental choice; institutional competition
Regulations, enforcement	Deregulation
Federal interventions	State and local initiatives
Diffusion of innovations	Exhortation; information sharing

*Source: Clark & Astuto (1986, P. 5)

TABLE 2. NEW RIGHT POLARITIES**

SACRED	PROFANE
Parental choice	Producer control
Accountability	The educational establishment
Cultural heritage	New subjects
Tradition	Multiculturalism; relevance; minority languages
Political unity	Politicised curriculum
The family	Personal, social, and health education
Latin and Greek	Social science, peace studies
O- and A-levels	GCSE
Sit down, terminal timed exams	Continuous, coursework assessment
Privatising examining	Teacher education; professionalism
Grammar schools	Comprehensive schools
Selection	Mixed-ability
Pupil entitlement	Totalising central powers
Market forces; opting out	Teacher unions; LEA Services; in-service education
Opted out; independent schools	LEAs (and the ILEA in particular)

**Source: Ball (1990, p.45)

- both countries have magnet schools, programs for school choice and school-business partnerships. In a strange turn of events, the CTCs in Britain (which, as mentioned above, were patterned after US magnet schools) may have been the inspiration for the Bush Administration's initiative that private industries contribute to the funding for its largely unsuccessful proposal to create an innovative echelon of "New American Schools";
- the Assisted Places Scheme in Britain has had a counterpart in unsuccessful proposals for federally-funded vouchers for disadvantaged urban youngsters to attend private schools. But this idea has, in fact, been adopted by the state of Wisconsin which provides state-funded of vouchers for poor children in one city—Milwaukee. This program has attracted a great deal of favourable attention as well as much criticism. In July, 1995, funding for this program was increased from 1,000 to 7,000 students and about 80 religious schools were added for the first time, immediately prompting a lawsuit charging that the program violated the constitutional separation of church and state. In the same month the state of Ohio adopted a program similar to Milwaukee's for the city of Cleveland;
- the opted-out, GMSs in Britain are paralleled (roughly) by the growing charter schools movement in the USA. Charter school laws, now authorised in 19 states, permit the creation of new or reconstituted public schools that are publicly funded, independent of local school districts (equivalent to Local Education Authorities—LEAs) and largely free of other bureaucratic control, but held accountable for results or student outcomes agreed upon in the charter authorising their creation.

THE EVOLVING RESPONSE OF THE "LOYAL OPPOSITION"

With this brief background of parallels in education policy between Britain and the USA, I now turn to the response of the opposition parties to these developments. In broad terms, the issues they confront revolve around the extent to which the government or the market should

shape education policy and the proper relationship between central and local (or state) government.

In Britain the education system has been radically reformed from top to bottom in a most dramatic (and for those living within it, traumatic) fashion. Despite the widespread discomfort of educators, and numerous research studies reporting negative or questionable effects of many of the changes (e.g., Fitz, Halpin, & Power, 1995; Gipps, 1995; Whitty, 1995), the public seems to favour many of the reforms. This leaves the Labour Party in an awkward position. One informant (Judge, 1995) put it this way:

> I do not think Blair can identify precisely what it is that the public does *not* like about Tory policies in education. The reduced National Curriculum is okay, league tables help parents (they think), teachers should be bashed more, bad schools should be abolished, standards should be pushed up. And on the less colourful, but ideologically very important, issues like state management of higher education or the Teacher Training Agency, new Labour is totally silent.

Nevertheless, with help from people like Michael Barber[4] and Tim Brighouse,[5] the Labour Party has issued a new education policy text which does suggest how it might approach many of the difficult issues that Conservative policies present for them. This document, called *Diversity and Excellence: A New Partnership for Schools,* includes the following key proposals:

- schools in England and Wales to control 90% of their budgets;
- an increase in parental representation on school governing bodies;

[4]Professor Michael Barber, Assistant Dean for New Initiatives, Institute of Education, University of London, formerly Education Secretary, National Union of Teachers, then Professor of Education, University of Keele.
[5]Professor Tim Brighouse, Chief Education Officer, Birmingham City Council.

- GMSs to be redesignated "foundation schools," owning their own buildings and employing staff (as at present); financial advantages associated with grant-maintained (GM) status to be phased out;
- the Funding Agency for Schools will be abolished; all schools will be funded on an equitable basis through LEAS;
- LEAs and schools to agree on admissions policies.

This document is very helpful in understanding where Labour policy may move but the difficulties that remain are substantial—with some dearly revealed in a recently published interview (Carvel, 1995) with David Blunkett, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary. Carvel notes, for example, that Roy Hattersley[6] contends that "the party's commitment to the comprehensive principle would be betrayed if it let GM schools continue selecting their pupils—allowing articulate and self-confident parents to talk their children's way into the 'best' schools.'" Carvel states that:

> Mr. Blunkett's defence is that he is proposing rather more local authority and Government control over all state schools' admissions than there was in previous Labour policy. The problem for the party leadership is that it has not yet decided what the new policy ought to be. Mr. Blunkett does not want admissions governed by geographical proximity because that could merely encourage the gentrification of a school's catchment area. He thinks bussing was a disaster in the United States.
>
> He is against selection by exam or more subtle social selection according to the preferences of headteachers. He says there is no such thing as parental choice

[6]Rt. Hon. R.S.G. Hattersley, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, 1983-1992.

> when, in reality, schools have the final say in choosing their pupils, but there is parental preference. Banding schemes—such as the one operated by the former Inner London Education Authority to ensure each school has an average spread of abilities—were inappropriate and based on unsatisfactory tests of pupils' verbal reasoning skills.

In conclusion, Blunkett said: "I am prepared to take on the challenge of trying to find a balance between parental preference and social integration and fairness to schools" (Carvel), but one can readily see from the above that this may require the wisdom of Solomon.

While both the Tories in the UK and the Republicans in the USA share many views and values, they differ dramatically in their attitude towards a strong central government. This difference illuminates important dimensions of the politics of both nations. In the USA, Republicans favour the least government possible and wish to see as many aspects as possible of the federal role returned to the states and local governments (or simply left undone). The government most feared by Americans is the federal government. This view has become even more salient with the recurrence of what Hofstadter (1965) called the paranoid style in American politics and also with the rise of the Christian Coalition as a very important political force supportive of the Republican Party. For members of the Christian Coalition it is said "there is little difference between being 'pro-family' and 'anti-government'" (as reported on National Public Radio, September 10, 1995), and to be pro-family in a Christian way is at the centre of their belief system. The increasing importance of religion in US politics, incidentally, highlights another important difference between the UK and USA: if religion is not dead in the UK, in comparison to the role it plays in the USA, it is nearly invisible as a force in public life.

In stark contrast to the Republicans' deep faith in local government, the Tories—and especially the Thatcherites—seem to mistrust local government and have dramatically increased the powers of central government—especially in education policy. Of course, differences

between the UK and the USA in political history and in the structure of government account for this contrast. From the Tory point of view, local councils and LEAs in England and Wales too often have been under the control of the Labour Party. As Conservatives see it, Labour governments (at whatever level) tend to be wasteful, big spenders and also political impediments to the realisation of Conservative goals—especially the dream of a simultaneous restoration and renewal of traditional British society, one that this time is embedded in an enterprise culture. Hence, it follows that strategies to weaken local government have been a leading motif of the Conservatives.

Thus, the Tories have accompanied measures of devolution in education with extensive and, some contend, overriding central controls that Republicans would find unthinkable. Ball (1990) and his colleagues (Henshaw, Ball, Radnor, & Vincent, 1995), for example, argue that Tory education policies (especially LMS, centrally controlled funding formulae and the undermining of the LEAS) have reduced, if not destroyed, the democratic local governance of education. Thus, it is argued (Henshaw et al., 1995, pp. 2, 7):

- the removal of responsibility, power, and budgetary freedom threatens to render local democratic control over education obsolete or defunct;
- education policy analysts have adopted the line, typically, that the National Curriculum and LMS represent two very different, and perhaps contradictory, aspects of education reform—the first as a form of centralisation and the latter as decentralisation. But that position ignores the extent to which LMS involves an assertion of central state control over the size, distribution, purposes and methods of local educational funding. The possibilities of local responsiveness to educational need and the setting of local priorities are severely constrained. Both the National Curriculum and LMS operate by excluding professional judgements from educational planning;

- the privatisation of school inspections in 1992 further reduces the direct responsibility of LEAs for monitoring their schools and gives further expression to Her Majesty's Government's preference for an education service governed by the principles of accelerating national regulation and market forces.

Of course, Conservatives will rightly contend that this analysis utterly disregards the democratic input of school governors and school staff to governance under LMS. Decision-makers in schools are apparently viewed by Henshaw et al. (1995) as having too narrow a perspective on the public interest and/or as being too circumscribed by national regulations to be able to govern in a truly democratic fashion in the interests of the broader community—something they seem to presume LEAs can or, at any rate, ought to do.

Leaving aside the debate about what is required at what level for democratic governance, there is no denying the contention of Henshaw et al. (1995) that Her Majesty's Government has tightly defined the rules within which the game of LMS will be played. Further, their analysis is consistent with the contention of Woods, Bagley, and Glatter (1995, p. 4) that Tory policies have not created a market for schooling (as has been claimed) but rather that quasi-markets have been created which operate under rules that were not the result of market forces:

> [D]ecisions are made by . . . Central Government . . . which have major implications for the market. It is Government initiatives that have, for example, created grant-maintained schools and CTCs and which have forestalled the development of state-funded Muslim schools . . . It is Government which determined that "league tables" of school performance should be published and which decided what measures of performance they should be based on. The desirability of these and other decisions setting the framework for the market can be debated. But they are clearly not the outcome of the operation of the market

and consumer choice. There are—for good or ill—political decisions which have important repercussions in the market.

In the USA, the evolving role of the loyal opposition is best seen by examining the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* which codifies a strategy known as "systemic school reform." *Goals 2000* seeks higher student learning outcomes for all children by encouraging all states to, voluntarily:

1. adopt rigorous standards and curriculum frameworks related to the eight national education goals;
2. link these standards and frameworks to a strong testing or performance assessment system;
3. establish opportunity to learn (OTL) standards specifying the minimum resources and opportunities that schools should provide to give all students a fair chance to learn the more challenging curricular content upon which they will be tested.[7]

The idea of OTL standards (also called school delivery standards) quickly proved to be controversial on political, as well as pedagogical, grounds (Kirst, 1994). OTL confronts reformers with an old problem: trying to determine, in some reasonable way, what minimum inputs and practices ought to be in place in all schools—but adds the explosive issue of which level(s) of government should have the responsibility for determining, financing, and enforcing such standards (see Porter, 1993, 1994).

The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was the product of a long policy development process which began about 1986 with the work of the National Governors Association. The initial idea revolved around achieving agreement on six broad national education goals—which was accomplished in 1989 under the leadership of the Republican President, George Bush. This

[7] For the intellectual work behind this see Smith and O'Day (1991), Clune (1993a, 1993b), and O'Day and Smith (1993).

process enjoyed broad bipartisan support from Republican as well as Democratic governors and legislators, although President Bush ran into opposition from the then Democrat-controlled Congress over the specifics of his related *America 2000* reform strategy—most notably because his plan called for public funds for private schools.

Under Democrat President, Bill Clinton, the *America 2000* plan was repackaged as *Goals 2000* (with funds for private schools deleted) and passed with bipartisan support. This bipartisanship, however, evaporated in the heat of the stunning Republican electoral victory in November 1994. With the Republicans in control of Congress for the first time in 40 years and the right-wing of their party in ascendancy over the moderates, war was declared against big government and what were perceived to be the many inefficient and unnecessary government programs.

Conservative think-tanks immediately called (once again) for the elimination of the federal Department of Education and a dramatic diminution of the federal role in education. Soon thereafter, two former Secretaries of Education—both highly visible Republicans with presidential aspirations—published an article critical of the thrust of the *Goals 2000* legislation. In a piece co-authored with Dan Coats, a Republican senator from Indiana, Lamar Alexander and William Bennett (Alexander, Bennett, & Coats, 1994, p. 42) wrote that:

> By signing off on HR-6 [the *Improving America's Schools Act* of 1994] and Goals 2000, President Clinton transformed a nationwide reform movement into a federal program . . . [thereby usurping the proper and legal control of education by local and state governments] . . . Clinton has even created something akin to a national school board, the National Education Standards and Improvement Council. Almost as worrying is the resurrection of inputs, resources, and sources as gauges of education quality. Three decades of research show no reliable link between what goes into schools and what children learn there. Yet Goals 2000

and HR-6 affirm the routine assertion of the education establishment: If you're not happy with school results, more money and regulations will improve them.

Alexander et al. (p. 44) concluded by calling for the repeal of HR-6 and saying that "it's time for the Federal Government virtually to withdraw from elementary and secondary education and relinquish the authority it has seized in this domain . . . Insofar as any education functions stay in Washington, their guiding principles should be choice, deregulation, innovation, accountability, and serious assessment keyed to real standards in core subjects."

Since the November 1994 election, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* has been increasingly demonised by right-wing Americans (Pitsch, 1994, 1995; Diegmueller, 1995a, 1995b; Sharpe, 1995), some of whom seem determined to revive the paranoid style in American politics.[8] Although the *Act* is replete with references to the voluntary nature of states' participation in the program, the old bugaboo of fear of federal control of education (e.g., in selecting curriculum, controlling standards and testing, and using the coercive potential of federal funds) has plagued the program and caused the provision for a National Education Standards and Improvement Council—part of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* denounced by Alexander et al. (1994) and many others—to be dead on arrival. At the extreme, the *Act* has become, as one journalist (Sharpe, p. A1) put it, "a political Rorschach test, embodying for some conservatives a host of government ills."

On August 4, 1995, the House of Representatives passed a bill which, had it not been vetoed, would have brought record cuts in the federal funding of education. It would have cut all funding for the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act.* For those who still believed that *Goals 2000* was a desirable program, the subsequent hope was that the Senate would pass a more generous

[8]Sharpe (1995, p.A6), for example, reports that some parents were circulating rumours that Goals 2000 was connected to a United Nations cabal and were discussing how school inoculation programs could result in injections of mind-controlling substances. At its most extreme, the paranoid style is epitomised by the recent growth of paramilitary, antigovernment militias and survivalist groups.

bill and that negotiations between the House, Senate, and President Clinton would lead to a compromise reducing the drastic cuts (Johnson, 1995). After months of uncertainty the President finally prevailed and obtained a very favourable compromise (in an omnibus appropriations bill passed on April 26, 1996) which restored most of the budget cuts Congress had proposed earlier. This was a far better outcome for educators than anyone expected early on and is a dramatic example of how Clinton politically outmanoeuvred the Republicans.[9]

Envoi

While the Republicans are now partially in control of the federal government in the United States, Labour still must prove that it can again win control of Parliament. With control of Congress, the Republicans already are putting some of their preferred policies into action. While we wait to see what Labour will actually do, the Republicans now face the test of making good on their claims that many federal responsibilities can be sent home to the states and that the USA does not need a federally-led comprehensive school reform plan. Like the splits within the Labour Party over how to deal with comprehensive versus selective schooling and GMSs, the Republicans face divisions within their ranks over national standards and comprehensive or systemic school reform. Corporate business leaders, whom Republicans tend to count as their own, very much see the need for national standards and systemic reforms, but many rank and file Republicans are suspicious of these efforts. It is not clear how Republican strategists will manage this tension.

Interestingly, some leading Republicans are beginning to move beyond the simplistic idea that local and state governments will somehow know and do the right things which, in their view, seem beyond the ability of the federal government. In a recent column in the *Wall Street Journal,* entitled "Moving Beyond Devolution," Bennett and Coats (1995, p. A14) wrote that:

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[9]For an account of the entire seven-month battle over the budget see Johnson (1996).

> Conservative thought on social policy must take a step beyond devolution and disincentives . . . Even if government directly undermined civil society, it cannot directly reconstruct it . . . Republican enthusiasm is reserved primarily for relimiting government . . . [But] the retreat of government does not always, at least immediately, result in a rebirth of society.

Bennett and Coats (1995, p. A14) say that "state governments are not the only alternatives to federal power that deserve trust and resources," and advocate a legislative proposal of 18 bills they are introducing in Congress to redirect federal aid towards a devolution of resources and power to private and religious institutions and families, the key agents, in their view, for rebuilding civil society. While their proposal for a strategy to ameliorate the problems plaguing US society is appealing, it still leaves untouched the question of how bottom-up initiatives might be coordinated or, on their own, somehow aggregate to solve the complex issues which confront Americans. As Fullan (1994) has shown, there is compelling evidence that complex reforms require a coordination of both bottom-up and top-down strategies.

In closing, it seems quite appropriate to note that the long-standing mistrust of strong central governments by Republicans and, indeed, many Americans came, in the first instance, from the USA's unfortunate colonial experiences with unresponsive and arbitrary English governors. Perhaps the differences we see today between Tories and Republicans are only modern re-enactments of the roles their forebears learned in colonial times, with the Republicans resisting central government and the Tories merrily subjugating unruly portions of the United Kingdom.

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The Laboratory for Student Success

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education to revitalize and reform educational practices in the service of student success.

The LSS mission is to significantly improve the capacity of the mid-Atlantic region—including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC—to enact and sustain lasting systemic educational reform by building on the resources of schools, families, and communities in the region to improve student learning. Through its broad-based programs of applied research and development and services to the field, LSS provides ongoing professional development and technical assistance to support efforts of local schools and state education agencies to achieve student success.

LSS was designated by the U.S. Department of Education as the lead laboratory for urban school reform. Accordingly, LSS has developed a national Urban Education Enhancement Program to address emerging issues of importance in strengthening our capacity to achieve healthy development and educational success of students in urban communities, and developing strategies for implementing and sustaining urban school reform.

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